

# Singing

*our way  
through the day*

## Using music with young children during daily routines

*Ja Ja Ja Ja*



By Petra Kern



**You've most likely noticed that young children often accompany their play with singing, chanting, rhyming, dancing, listening to music, or playing their favorite instruments. For instance, young children can often be heard making loud motor noises while playing with toy cars, making up rhymes while dressing dolls, or inventing songs while playing in the bathtub. Music is a natural way for children to explore the world and to interact with their social environment. As such, music is an exceptional medium and motivator for encouraging and supporting young children's learning and development during daily transitions and routines.**

Music can also encourage and facilitate inclusion. It can be used to create opportunities for children with disabilities to successfully participate in daily life. It should be noted that children with disabilities are not necessarily disabled in their musicality. Children with autism, for example, often demonstrate musical aptitudes that are equal to or higher than those of children with other disabilities or their typically developing peers.

Because of children's natural affinity for music, adults often incorporate music when they are spending time or working with children. Parents hum lullabies while rocking their babies, many early childhood educators use music to structure classroom activities and enhance learning, and, as a music therapist, I often plan musical experiences for specific purposes such as prompting through routines or cuing transitions from one activity to the next. Music can be used in countless ways to capture children's attention and guide them through the day.



# Ja Ja Ja Lalala Ja

**Musical strategy:** Using music as a cue; in this case, music is used to signal that it's time to put away toys.

**Musical activity:** To improve Andy's participation in putting away his toys, the classroom teacher sings the Barney and Friends "Clean Up" tune:

*Clean up, clean up, everybody everywhere.*

*Clean up, clean up, everybody do your share.*

## 9:15-9:30 a.m. — Circle time

**Scenario:** This school year, Maggie and her teaching team decided to include new strategies to further enhance pre-literary skills of the 4- to 5-year-olds in their classroom. Looking into the research literature, she discovered that music can enhance pre-reading and writings skills in young children. Maggie consults with the music therapist and asked for musical pre-literacy activities that are easy to implement.

**Musical strategy:** Using music as a prompt and also as a way of stimulating academic learning, such as enhancing pre-literacy skills illustrated in this example.

**Musical activity:** The music therapist prepares the following list of musical activities and offers to demonstrate them during the classroom's circle time:

### *Pre-reading*

- Have children tap out syllables on different body parts or a drum when practicing new names or vocabulary. For example: *Mo-ni-ca* or *lem-on-ade*.
- Teach phonemic awareness by placing the loudest drum beat on the emphasized letter of the word. For example: For *A-na-belle*, the loudest drum beat would be on *A*.
- Identify letters of the alphabet by singing the alphabet song paired with large print letters. Scaffold the song activity by

pausing at different letters and letting the children find the corresponding printed letter placed on the floor.

- Provide picture books based on songs or rhythmical text (for example, *The Jazz Fly*, *Philadelphia Chickens*, *Chicka Chicka Boom Boom*, or *Five Little Monkeys*). Ask children to put their index finger on the first word and follow along with their finger under the words as you sing the song.
- Work on comprehension skills by singing a song and discussing the content of the song or letting children act out the content of the song with props. Ask the children to guess what might happen in the following verses of the song.

### *Pre-writing*

- Engage children in free painting or drawing while listening to recorded music. Ask them to match the style (for example, classical, pop, blues, or jazz) and pace, or tempo, of the music when drawing.
- Have children copy a drawing of a letter. Sound out the letter while drawing the lines with a crayon.
- Ask children to make up a song about "putting your pencil to the left and scribble to the right" while making marks or "writing" from left to right on a piece of paper.
- Ask children to listen carefully to the lyrics of a song, and then have them illustrate the song.

## 9:30-10 a.m. — Breakfast

**Scenario:** Andy, who has learned to put his toys away when his teacher sings to him, now learns how to wash hands using a song about washing hands.

**Musical strategy:** Using music as a prompt, in this instance to teach the washing of hands as part of the breakfast routine.

**Musical activity:** To teach Andy the seven steps of hand washing practiced by all children in the class, his teacher sings the familiar tune "Row Your Boat" except with the following new lyrics:

*Turn, turn, turn it on, turn the water on.  
Lalala lalala lalala la, turn the water on.*

*Wet, wet, wet your hands, wet your hands  
right now.  
Lalala lalala lalala la, wet your hands  
right now.*

*Get, get, get the soap, get the soap right now.  
Lalala lalala lalala lala la, get the soap  
right now.*

*Rub, rub, rub your hands, rub your  
hands right now.  
Lalala lalala lalala la, wet your hands  
right now.*

*Rinse, rinse, rinse them off, rinse them  
off right now,  
Lalala lalala lalala la, rinse your hands  
right now.*

*Turn, turn, turn it off, turn the water off.  
Lalala lalala lalala la, turn the water off.*

The teacher then gives Andy a paper towel and praises him for following the musical directions during the hand washing routine.

## 10-11:30 a.m. — Free choice and structured activities

**Scenario:** Four-year-old Fred seeks frequent, intense, and varied sensory experiences. He likes to actively explore the world by touching, hearing, tasting, seeing, and smelling. To address Fred's needs for frequent sensory experiences and active exploration of his environment, his teachers often build in sensory play, which all children in the class seem to enjoy. One of Fred's teachers observed that he likes to explore different sounds, so he set up a table at which the children could build an ocean drum.

**Musical strategy:** Using music to stimulate children's senses.

**Musical activity:** To provide Fred and his classmates with a variety of sensory stimuli, the teacher incorporates an activity she learned during an in-service training on

how to build small instruments and use them during circle time (see the instructions for making an ocean drum).

**11:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. —  
Playground time**

**Scenario:** Lucas is a 3-year-old boy with autism who likes to run and spin objects such as balls on the playground. While other children engage in pretend play and act out different roles in a firefighter game, Lucas runs into some children and takes their toys away. The other children are upset; Lucas is also upset because he does not yet understand how to play and share toys with his peers. Lucas does, however, like to engage in music and dance activities with his peers during circle time.

**Musical strategy:** Using music both as a prompt and to reinforce positive behavior, namely engaging in positive peer interactions during outdoor play.

# Building an ocean drum

By Petra Kern

**Materials:**

- Two blue transparent interlocking plastic plates, at least 9.4" x 8.6" in diameter.
- Colored plastic beads
- Blue duct tape

**Construction:**

- Place two small handfuls of plastic beads on one plate.
- Flip the second plate upside down and place it over the plate that has beads on it.
- Align latches and press the rims together to close.
- Duct tape the rim of the plates so the beads are carefully sealed for safety.

**How to play the instrument:**

Activate the ocean drum by circling the beads slowly inside the plates.

**Activities:**

- Explore different ways of playing the ocean drum; for example, shake it, tap it, role the beads from one side to the other. Listen to the different sounds.
- Play slow and fast, soft and loud.
- Watch the beads roll and swirl.
- Imitate the ocean sound using your voice.
- Ask children if they have seen the ocean before and what images and stories come to mind when they think of the ocean.
- Orchestrate the different sounds and conduct an "ocean music" piece. Have children take turns conducting.
- Play the ocean drum along with guided imagery as part of a meditation or relaxation exercise.

**Adaptations:**

- Assist children with disabilities in building their own ocean drum.
- Prompt children with disabilities to explore the instrument.
- Interact with children with disabilities by playing the ocean drum together.



**Lucas' Dance**

Words and music  
by Petra Kern

Swing ♩ = 108

1. What I real-ly like to do, is to have a dance with you.  
 2. What I real-ly like to do, is to play the instrument with you.  
 3. What I real-ly like to do, is to give a big to you.  
 4. What I real-ly like to do, is to hic - kle, the - kle you.  
 5. What I real-ly liked to do, was to make me - sic with you.

*Time*

What I real-ly like to do, is to have a dance with you.  
 What I real-ly like to do, is to play the instrument with you.  
 What I real-ly like to do, is to give a big to you.  
 What I real-ly liked to do, was to make me - sic with you.

*Fine*

Child 1, repetition Child 2

1. Round and round we go, some - times last  
 2. Play the instrument, oh let us sound, Some - times soft and  
 3. Green - tie, kle, let soft and Chil - dren calm, I'll hold you  
 4. Tie - kle, tie - kle, Chil - dren some tummys, He will think it's

some - times slow,  
 some - times loud,  
 in my arms,  
 real - ly tummys.

Round and round we go,  
 Plus the instrument, oh let  
 tie - kle, tie - kle, Chil - dren some tummys, round let  
 us sound, calm, I'll hold you

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**Musical activity:** To support Lucas' peer interaction and teach him and other children how to play with each other, the early childhood education team decides to bring music to the outdoor environment. The Music Hut, which includes a gong, six drums, a cymbal, sound tubes, an ocean drum, and a marching drum, is a big attraction for all the children. To structure Lucas' peer interaction through music, I composed a song called "Lucas' Dance" (see sidebar) that taps into his interests and strengths. The classroom teacher sings the song with Lucas and all children in the Music Hut, and acts out the lyrics of the song.

**12:30-1 p.m. — Lunch**

**Scenario:** Susie is 3 years old and has multiple developmental delays associated with Cornelia de Lange Syndrome, a congenital syndrome characterized by slow growth and small stature, cognitive delays that are usually severe to profound, digestive problems, and hearing and/or visual impairment. Susie

# Ja Ja Ja

does not use words or gestures to communicate her needs. During lunch time, her teachers offer her choices for beverages and food. Because Susie has not yet learned to respond to simple yes and no questions, her teachers are increasingly frustrated and are very eager to find an intervention that will help Susie indicate or say yes and no. Realizing that Susie participates enthusiastically during music activities at circle time, her classroom teachers consulted with me to find out if a song intervention might assist Susie in learning to make and communicate choices.

**Musical strategy:** Using music as a prompt and also to stimulate learning — in this case to facilitate making choices.

**Musical activity:** To assist Susie in learning gestures for *yes* (for example, nodding your head) and *no* (for example, shaking our head) and also to say yes and no when

offered a choice, I composed a Yes and No song and introduced it to Susie, her classmates, and her teachers during circle time. After three rounds of singing and posing both serious and silly questions to all of the children, everyone had learned the song. I encourage the children and classmates to use the “Yes and No” song whenever they ask Susie a question. As soon as Susie demonstrates that she understands the concept of nodding for yes and shaking her head for no, the teachers will gradually fade out parts of the song until Susie no longer needs the song as a prompt to respond.

## 1:30-3:30 p.m. — Naptime

**Scenario:** Sarah is a typically developing 4-year-old who, like many of her classmates, becomes quite tired after an eventful morning at the center. Because she’s usually busy thinks about the many exciting things she could be doing, Sarah often has a hard time settling onto her cot for naptime.

**Musical strategy:** Using music to enhance relaxation.

**Musical activity:** To help calm Sarah and her classmates, the teacher invites all of the children to lie down on their cots, get comfortable, and listen to guided imagery supported by music (for example, Pachelbel: Forever by the Sea) from the classroom’s relaxation CD collection. As soon as the music starts, the classroom teacher says the following in a soothing voice:

*Find your cot and stretch out on your back.*

*Take a deep breath in and squeeze all your muscles tight.*

*Now relax all your muscles and let all your energy out with a long aaahhhh.*

*Close your eyes and let your body relax. Count to 10, slowly and silently.*

*Keep your eyes closed, and pretend you are lying on the beach, on a warm sunny day.*



“I was pleasantly surprised to see the direct application of learning to my career. Each and every aspect of the reading, discussion, and homework assignments directly related to what I do with children and families!”

Erin Hanson

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*Pretend you can see the waves, coming up over the sand and going back out to the ocean again.*

*Listen to the waves, coming up on the shore and then going back to the ocean.*

*Breathe in and out, in and out, just like the waves coming in and going out, over and over again.*

*(Repeat, more quietly) Breathe in and out, in and out, just like the waves coming in and going out, over and over again.*

*Now, listen quietly to the music, and rest....*

#### **4-4:30 p.m. — Snack time**

**Scenario:** After naptime, 5-year-old Frederick can't wait for his snack. When no one is paying attention, his little hands grab at the bowls filled with fruits and cookies. When his teacher tells him to wait and share the snack with his friends, he gets frustrated and slaps at the table.

**Musical strategy:** Using music as a cue as well as to reinforce positive behavior, such as self-control in this example.

**Musical activity:** To assist Frederick in developing self-control and delaying gratification, his teacher engages him and his classroom peers in the following song, using sign language for the word wait. Later, she encourages the children to initiate the song with each other during lunchtime and other situations during which there might be some waiting time.

#### **4:30-5:30 p.m. — Playground time and family pick up**

**Scenario:** It's the end of an eventful day at the center. Rebecca, a classroom teacher, and her class are going on the playground where children will engage in free play until they are picked up by their families. Some

of the children are simply too tired to run around and aren't quite sure what to do with the remaining time.

**Musical strategy:** Music as a cue, for example, when it's time to say good-bye and reflect upon the day.

**Musical activity:** To involve children who are less engaged in free play, Rebecca offers to sing a good-bye song about the things that each child enjoyed during the day. To encourage parents to sing along as they pick up their children, Rebecca uses the familiar song "Old McDonald had a Farm" and improvises the following lyrics:

*Now it's time to say good-bye,  
I had a happy day.*

*When mommy or daddy picks me up,  
this is what I say...*

The teacher then prompts the child verbally.

For example: "What are you going to tell your mom or dad you did today?" The children then call out favorite activities such as painting, playing on the playground, eating a snack. The teacher then builds in activities in the second part of the song. For example...

*With a paint, paint here and a  
playground there.*

*Here a lunch, there a snack,  
everywhere a snack, snack.*

*Now it's time to say good-bye,  
I had a happy day.*

#### **Musical transitions**

Looking more closely at the classroom schedule, we can identify many times during the day when transition must occur. For example, transitioning from home to school, free play to circle time, circle time to breakfast, breakfast to group activities, group activities to outdoor play, outdoor play to lunch, lunch to naptime, naptime to outdoor play, and outdoor play to departure. These are all wonderful opportunities to incorpo-

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rate music and to use the musical strategies discussed earlier. Again, this might entail singing transition songs that are commercially available, making up new lyrics to a familiar tune, or using an instrument to cue a certain behavior or response, for instance, using a triangle to let the children know that it's time to go outside or finger cymbals to cue listening during circle time.

Songs are a good way to announce changes and help prepare children for an upcoming activity. Because children learn through repetition, transition songs should be sung repeatedly until the transition is completed. When singing a transition song, sing directly to the children and model the task at hand. If needed, give children some physical prompts until they learn what is expected from them during the specific transition. To ensure successful transitions, it is important that you have the next activity ready or arrive at the appropriate location as soon as the transition song ends. And the same transition songs should be used across different environments and by everyone who works with the children. Be sure to share songs with parents and other caregivers so they can also use the song for transitions outside of the center.

#### **Steps in creating your own transition song**

1. Choose a specific transition (for example, transitioning from hand washing to breakfast).
2. Pick a familiar tune (for example, *If You're Happy and You Know It*).
3. Identify keywords (for example, breakfast, seat, eat, juice, fruit)
4. Fit the words to the familiar tune. If you want your song to rhyme, you could use a songwriter's rhyming dictionary to help you create the lyrics.
5. Modify the song by including objects or pictures symbols when working with

**Go to [www.songsforteaching.com/transitions.htm](http://www.songsforteaching.com/transitions.htm) to find songs for classroom transitions.**

# La La La

children who have special needs (for example, a piece of fruit or a picture symbol from Mayer-Johnson's Board-maker indicating breakfast).

## Sample song:

Tune: **If You're Happy and You Know It**

*If you're ready for your breakfast,  
find your seat.*

*If you're ready for your breakfast,  
come let's eat.*

*We will have some juice and fruit,  
Toast and jelly which tastes so good.*

*If you're ready for your breakfast,  
find your seat.*

## Sound cues

We all hear sound cues throughout the day. Perhaps we hear church bells that let us know it's noon or a repeated ding as we exit the car lets us know we left the car lights on. Sound cues can also be embedded into children's daily routines as a way to cue transitions (such as transitioning from outdoor to indoor). When the signal is immediately and repeatedly paired with the action, children quickly learn to anticipate what comes next when they hear the sound cue. Children often enjoy taking an active part in activating the sound cue themselves. For example, each day a different child might be assigned the task of ringing of a triangle when it's time for the children to go inside for lunch. When working with children with special needs who use picture symbols, be sure to pair sound cues with visuals.

## Summing it up

When applied intentionally and used in a systematic manner, music can be a

## Evidence of efficiency

Research indicates that music can be effectively used to enhance socialization, self-expression, communication, motor development, and cognitive functioning of young children with and without disabilities. In keeping with recommended practices in early childhood education, music interventions may be embedded into children's daily routines to support individual learning goals.

A series of single-case studies conducted at the FPG Child Care Program demonstrated that...

- Individual song interventions may be effective in increasing the independent performance of young children with autism during the morning transition and multi-step self-care routines.
- Music may help expand children's level of peer interactions on the playground.
- Teachers can implement musical intervention strategies successfully when training and monitoring by a music therapist are provided.

A summary of the single case studies can be downloaded on the FPG Web site, [www.fpg.unc.edu](http://www.fpg.unc.edu) (see snapshot #35, #39, and #45). The songs used in the playground study are published in the songbook noted below, along with project descriptions and guidelines for writing and measuring IEP goals using a song.

The ideas and strategies proposed in the musical transitions section of this article represent common practices used by music therapists when working with young children. They also stem in part from a presentation and an informal pilot study conducted by Humpal and Register (2004, 2007). Results of the three case examples from this pilot study indicated that transition songs...

- Helped children respond more quickly to directives.
- Elicited a greater level of calmness among children during times of transition.
- Facilitated a sense of group cohesiveness.
- Were well received by teachers as a way to manage the classroom.

wonderful tool for helping you manage the classroom and enhance children's learning. Song interventions can easily be embedded into daily routines with minimal time and effort but with tremendous results. As an early childhood professional, allow yourself the freedom to tap into your natural affinity for music and add a little harmony to the day! **C&F**

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*Petra Kern, MT-BVM, MT-BC, MTA, is a clinician, educator, and researcher in music therapy. Her work focuses on young children, inclusion, autism, and visual impairments. She currently is a visiting scholar at the FPG Child Development Institute, UNC at Chapel Hill and serves on faculty at SUNY New Paltz. Kern is passionate about bringing music to the daily lives of children and families.*

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Additional information about music therapy for early childhood education settings (including a comprehensive review of the research literature addressing all of the topics mentioned in this article) can be found in the American Music Therapy Association's Fact sheet: *Music Therapy and the Young Child*. Go to [www.musictherapy.org](http://www.musictherapy.org) for more information.